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Canada unveils National Marine Conservation Areas System Plan - A Big "Splash" for Marine Heritage -

VICTORIA, July 12, 1995 - The new National Marine Conservation Areas System Plan, "Sea to Sea to Sea", provides the underpinning for Parks Canada's developing system of national marine conservation areas, Canadian Heritage Minister Michel Dupuy announced today.

The Plan marks an important step forward in protecting Canada's marine environments. As a blueprint for system development, it clearly sets out Parks Canada's approach for the design of a finite network of national marine conservation areas, whereby the country's three oceans and Great Lakes have been divided into 29 distinct marine regions. The long-term goal is to have a national marine conservation area within each region.

"The diversity and abundance of marine life which surrounds our country has helped to shape Canadian culture and identity since the earliest of times," said Mr. Dupuy. "Our new National Marine Conservation Areas System Plan will help us ensure that the very best of our marine heritage is protected for future generations."

The framework is one which will ultimately put Canada in the forefront of marine conservation in the world. In fact, this approach for designing a marine protected areas system was pioneered by Parks Canada and has since been adopted by other countries.

"Sea to Sea to Sea" also outlines the procedures normally followed by Parks Canada in creating new national marine conservation areas. As well, it describes each marine region with words and illustrations and provides a summary of the status of each with respect to the establishment of a national marine conservation area.

There are currently three National Marine Conservation Areas : Fathom Five in Georgian Bay, Gwaii Haanas in British Columbia, and Saguenay -St. Lawrence in Quebec.

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CANADA'S NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREAS SYSTEM PLAN

PURPOSE

Canada has the longest coastline in the world totalling almost a quarter of a million kilometres. About a decade ago, building upon growing national and international concern for the protection of marine environments, Canada initiated a National Marine Park Programme. This programme recognized the wealth of our marine ecosystems and endeavoured to protect them. In 1994, it was renamed the National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) programme. This new name recognizes that the main focus of these areas will be on sustainable use, rather than on more stringent protection associated with national parks.

The programme's objective is to protect and conserve for all time a system of special marine areas

representative of Canada's oceans and Great Lakes. To do this, Parks Canada has divided the country's oceans and Great Lakes into 29 distinct marine regions based on oceanographic and biological features. The long-term goal is to have a NMCA within each region.

WHAT IS A NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREA?

National marine conservation areas are marine areas managed for sustainable use and contain smaller zones of high protection. They will ideally include the seabed, its subsoil and overlying water column, and in some cases, estuaries, islands, nearby wetlands and other coastal lands. They may also be established offshore to protect marine areas some distance from Canada's coastline. In the long term, it is hoped that these areas will serve as models for a more holistic approach to the planning and management of marine environments.

NMCA's are meant to:

represent the diversity of Canada's marine ecosystems
maintain marine ecological processes
preserve biodiversity
serve as "models" of sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems

facilitate marine research and ecological monitoring
protect depleted, threatened, rare or endangered species and their critical habitats
protect and maintain areas critical to the life cycles of economically important species
provide for the interpretation of marine areas for the purpose of conservation, education and tourism

In order to accomplish these broad goals, national marine conservation areas will ideally be quite large. Because they cannot be considered in isolation from the surrounding region, NMCA's will, by necessity, involve a variety of jurisdictions and resource users in their management.

Like national parks, NMCA's are set aside by the Parliament of Canada for the benefit of all Canadians, and do not permit such activities as undersea mining, oil and gas operations and ocean dumping within their boundaries. As well, special areas or features which warrant specific preservation measures will be zoned for the highest degree of protection. However, in contrast to national parks where the commercial harvesting of natural resources is not permitted, NMCA's foster both conservation and resource use on a sustainable basis.

CURRENT STATUS

Five of the 29 marine regions are currently represented: two by Gwaii Haanas, one by Fathom Five, one by Saguenay-St. Lawrence and one by the marine component to Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. Future priorities for the NMCA programme are currently being established.

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